

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph [0007] with the following amended paragraph:

[0007] U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/920,227 by Laura Ball and Sylvia Rakotoarison, *supra*, discloses a process for making a water-free fused silica by plasma induction. The process involves injecting a silica precursor and oxygen into a plasma. The silica precursor is oxidized in the plasma to form silica particles which are deposited on a deposition surface. The deposition surface is heated to consolidation temperatures so that the silica particles immediately consolidate into glass. To make a water-free silica glass, a hydrogen-free silica precursor is used, and the process takes place in a controlled atmosphere that is substantially free of water vapor. One suitable hydrogen-free silica precursor for the process is SiCl_4 . However, oxidation of SiCl_4 produces chlorine gas, as shown by equation (1) below:

